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ABSTRACT

This summary, the last of a four-part study of social networks in Pontiac, Michigan, presents highlights from the three previous volumes and advocates the use of network research for understanding the dissemination process in educational innovation. Based on the conclusion that social networks provide a metaphor for understanding complex social relationships and for illustrating the importance of trust among units in a system, the following considerations and recommendations are offered to the National Institute of Education (NIE), the funding agency: (1) appropriate methodology is needed for educators interested in social network research; (2) research dealing with the nature of innovations, rather than networks per se, may be more useful to the NIE; (3) NIE should give attention to ethical issues in community studies; (4) a copy of all federally funded research reports should be made available to the community studied; (5) historical, social, and interorganizational data should be considered as integral parts of research; (6) school personnel should be considered more in research on school community relations; (7) relations between school and community should be more systematically organized; (8) programs designed to improve race relations should be continued in desegregated schools and in the community; (9) the financial support and promotion of interorganizational networks may be more fruitful than the support of individual associations; and (10) educational change is inseparable from community change. (Author/GC)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

OF

THE WORK OF NETS

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Research Report

for

The National Institute of Education

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PART IV - SUMMARY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary: Part I - Theoretical and Methodological Issues

. Social networks are generally viewed as structural arrangements that can be mapped and described parsimoniously through mathematical representation. Formal models of network relationships can be inferred. However, our technical capacity to handle data has outstripped our ability to generate valid data using traditional techniques. This is particularly true when data is generated in a turbulent field.

. The concept of social networks is a useful metaphor because it describes social relationships clearly, emphasizing the complexity of existing ties as well as their multiplex, dynamic qualities. Although some researchers express concern that the metaphorical use of networks diminishes rigor and measurement precision, pressures for premature closure of the concept may also reduce theoretical usefulness.

. The "work of nets" refers to the functions of nets: how networks are used by persons or organizations and how persons and organizations are affected by networks. One of the most important functions of voluntary networks is to transmit TRUST. Trust is both a social psychological quality and a systemic feature that can be used to cope with complexity. Trust is also a component of power because it enhances credibility and gives legitimacy to persons, actions or perspectives. Some other functions of networks are: to provide a common language for discussing social relations; to show relationships between

individuals and organizations; to link micro and macro social structures; to mobilize and exchange resources; to restrict or facilitate access; to build cohesion in systems; to represent social structure and to provide an analytical framework for structural data.

. Based on an examination of functions, social networks can be defined as the structuring of social relations that makes possible social exchanges between units linked together.

. Network analysis highlights interdependency, relationships and the linkages between units, thereby reflecting the complexity of social ties. But an emphasis on structure tends to overlook the dynamic processes of networking, as well as to direct attention away from the flows that pass through network canals. Networking can also be used as a strategy to mobilize resources. Attention to network flows may lead to understanding latency in networks, as well as boundaries. Social structuring requires continuous negotiation and is an active process.

. Recipes are analytical statements based upon a series of accounts by subjects that reflect shared assumptions. Although a recipe is not articulated directly, it can be inferred from the meaning of other statements. Recipes serve three functions: to define situations, to evaluate phenomena, and to offer a prescription for action. Some recipes are network specific, but all recipes are not. Those shared across networks serve as integrative features of society; those shared within a network help define boundaries. Often recipes are contradictory and unclear. At times some

recipes are more salient than others. However, because social relations have meaning, it is important to examine recipes to make qualitative interpretations of interaction. Recipes can be recognized by their ability to predict and explain actions: they make sense of what is said.

Summary: Part II - A Sociological View of an All-American City

This descriptive and historical analysis of Pontiac, Michigan between 1964 and 1981 provides the context for the analyses of networks.

. School desegregation has been an important feature of community desegregation. By providing a base of power within the school district for black administrators, and an organizational vehicle for parents to use in schools and other areas of community life, desegregation has led to more pluralistic communal institutions. Black political power in city government and other public institutions became more influential because of school desegregation.

. Although school desegregation was not an academic program, it has been judged by many in terms of academic effects. As a result, the importance of school desegregation as an instrument for community desegregation has been largely overlooked.

. In Pontiac, the most significant factors affecting community development have not been educational, but economic. Poverty has been a serious problem

throughout the decade, but it has not been recognized because of Pontiac's location in an affluent county and the large G.M. tax base that made city government appear prosperous.

. During most of the seventies, the Pontiac School District retained its economic viability in spite of growing poverty among residents because of the industrial tax base and expanding federal funding. As these two sources of income decrease in importance, it is clear that local residents cannot support an expensive school system. Throughout the eighties fiscal difficulties will command most of the energy of school administrators as they have during the late seventies.

. It is not desegregation, but economic decline that has led to an increasing segregation of students by class, not race. Middle class parents, both black and white, continue to place their children in private schools, as public schools reduce programs due to fiscal difficulties

. For the next few years, it would appear that Pontiac will remain a desegregated school district racially but the student body, like the city population, will come increasingly from poor families. As a result of the decline in the industrial base for jobs, Pontiac has experienced the highest rate of structural unemployment of any city in Michigan since 1970. Moreover, since Pontiac depends overwhelmingly on General Motors for employment, unemployment will likely increase as General Motors adopts more automated production technology. The per capita income of residents in

Pontiac will remain low. The number of poor residents in the community continues to increase because of low cost housing, patients released from Clinton Valley State Hospital who remain in the city, an increase in single heads of households, and a rise in the number of elderly residents. The school district must either operate on less money or find new sources of revenue.

. Busing can be considered an educational innovation placed upon Pontiac. Whether accepted or rejected by residents, the court order was perceived as a decision that the local community had to accept. As the first northern city to experience court-ordered busing, the city received almost no assistance from the State of Michigan, other educational bureaucracies, or county governments in complying with the order. Most community conflict over desegregation occurred prior to the court order for busing. Once the order was issued and school and community leaders adopted a firm stand toward compliance, violence diminished. Uncertainty, delay and lack of direction compounded local antagonisms toward busing and desegregation. Some of the community conflict preceding the court order can be understood as an effort by residents to define complex issues and problems, and to respond to race as a political issue. Because of the negative publicity associated with racial conflict in Pontiac, building the Silverdome sports stadium, keeping the hospital in the community, and Downtown Development had symbolic importance and gave hope to many in the community.

. Desegregation was a catalyst for the rise of black political power in the community, unifying various black groups and legitimizing black claims for

political power. School desegregation and mandated citizen participation provided local black leaders with a power base from which they could influence city hall and other local institutions. In effect, the school district "created" organizations to relate to the community instead of working with regular community organizations. Middle class black residents had grown steadily in political and economic power throughout the 40s and 50s, and in this way, set the stage for dramatic gains during the sixties. Desegregation added to the complexity of Pontiac but was a symptom, not the cause, of the "politics" of race.

- The community is more desegregated in 1981 than in 1971.

- The Human Resources Center was a bold experiment in community education. It failed because the idea was not widely accepted throughout the district, sufficient resources were not assigned to sustaining the project, the school programs probably attempted to do too much at once (mainstreaming handicapped children, desegregation, open classrooms and team teaching) and downtown development did not proceed as fast as planners had expected. History provides little evidence that interorganizational coordination or a community-wide service delivery system can be developed.

- A local grass roots advocacy network developed over key community issues, but by the end of the decade, most participants in the network had been absorbed in providing services and supporting black leaders in community decision organizations.

. Pontiac has increased in COMPLEXITY during this decade for many reasons: the legitimization of pluralism, national and international events that affected local development; growing interdependence with other political units; increased mobility and rapid social change.

Summary: Part III - Network Investigation: Differences and Similarities

. Four networks are analyzed with regard to the following: history, location in the interorganizational field, official purpose of the network, involvement and recruitment of members, leadership, coordinator of facilitator activities, decision making, sorority activities, resource mobilization, sub networks, the work of nets, significance in the school-community interorganizational field, the future of the network, significance of the study for network research, and conclusion. The four networks are a sorority, an interorganizational helping network, a parents' group and an organizational coalition.

. LATENCY is a quality in voluntary networks that explains why the concept appears elusive, and why boundaries are so difficult to determine. Trust is the basis of latency and can be identified through an analysis of shared recipes.

. The view of community as an interorganizational field is useful in examining community network relationships. The school is relatively isolated from the major participants in the helping network. In the

interorganizational field, the school district is linked closely to the administrative network but distant from other community decision sectors. In Pontiac, General Motors dominates all other community organizations and is the most powerful community decision maker.

. Thinking in terms of community as an organizational field also highlights the RATIONALIZATION of community life. As more activities are organized and goal directed, decisions are made largely through representatives of organizations. Communities become less spontaneous, particularistic and diffuse. Other factors contributing to the rationalization of community are political awareness and the recognition of the value of organization to achieve goals. Desegregation also encouraged careful accounting of racial representation and stimulated the expectation through the community that major activites should have minority representatives participating. This is both a legitimization of pluralism and a factor that contributed to rationalization. In addition, the grants process required record keeping and more accurate local information, thereby encouraging the development of local specialists. National developments and increasing complexity also fostered community rationalization.

. Applying an index of desegregation based upon subject nominations, it was possible to label several community decision organizations desegregated. We also found evidence of interracial trust at several levels in the community and we located a variety of persons and groups in both races who would refer to trusted association with persons of the other race. However, race relations remain a serious issue in the community as they do in American society as a whole.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Social Networks

. We view social network research as useful in understanding the dissemination process in educational innovation. Social networks provide a metaphor for understanding complex social relationships and for illustrating the importance of trust among units in a system. Trust is also a dimension of power because it legitimizes activities. In addition, trust remains a critical resource for coping with complexity. The work of nets is to clothe ideas, conceptions and recipes with trust. A key educational questions for policy makers is how to guarantee trust among units in a system. Educational innovators must also re-examine the role of trust as a key component in dissemination. Wherever possible, NIE might also require the use of local personnel in data collection activities as a contract condition.

. There is a need for appropriate methodology for educators interested in social network research. A mid-point between sophisticated quantitative analyses and formal structural modeling and simplistic popular literature is required. In addition, NIE should also explore a variety of dissemination materials, other than journal research reports, so that understanding about networks is more accessible to practioners.

. NIE might find that research efforts dealing with the nature of innovations rather than networks per se to be a more useful research strategy. Since trust is such an important component of network flows, it is unlikely that artifically sponsored networks of individuals can influence educational practices. Moreover, there is danger in destroying trust by viewing networks specifically to manipulate social relationships.

Community Studies

. All research is a social process. It is particularly important that NIE pay attention to ethical issues in community studies. These include: protecting the research site, preserving local autonomy, insisting that researchers spend creditable amounts of time in the field to know many facets of the community,and recognizing that subjects may be at risk in providing information to researchers because anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

. One way to demonstrate reciprocity with local communities would be for NIE to assume leadership in collecting research studies done in the community. It would be useful if a copy of all federally funded studies were routinely filled with the local public library or at a nearby unversity. NIE should encourage other research funding groups, as well as state and private foundations, to follow this practive routinely. At the present time, it is impossible to find a central place where various research studies that have been conducted in

community. There should be designated centers for community research in libraries, similar to those currently used for literature on specific nations.

. Social scientists have paid insufficient attention to the context of research projects. Characteristics of the field are research issues. Increased use of computers in research will aggravate the situation. Historical and situational background information must not be neglected. In addition, many education researchers overlook interorganizational data. As an ecological view of education becomes more important in conceptualizing schools in society, these ommissions are serious.

School-Community Relations

. Educators require a more sophisticated approach to public relations to create new publics that can replace traditional parental support. One way to accomplish this is to draw attention to the work of school personnel at the building level and student achievements.

. All school personnel require a more aggressive and active approach in the local interorganizational field School employees should be encouraged to participate in local civic groups through released time and recognition. They should also be asked to partake in community activities as school representatives and helped to become more

sensitive to the community maintenance obligations of the local schools. School relations in the community should become more rationalized, by which we mean more systematically organized and developed.

. Although it is unlikely that schools will play a significant role in the local interorganizational helping network because there is no coordinating power to lead this process, local cooperation remains a target of opportunity for educators. In particular, participating in a local children's helping network might be one way to build new support gruops to work with schools. At the present time, the major factor preventing the cooperation is the general consensus among educators and local citizens alike that the school's domain should be restricted to academic concerns. Efforts to link schools to important local organizations (e.g. business and city government through programs (e.g. cooperative education), and volunteer programs that link students and the community in helping relationships, should be encouraged.

School Desegregation

. Our major finding--that school desegregation does promote community desegregation in organizational leadership--should be considered in policies related to school desegregation.

. Desegregation does not diminish the social problems associated with race relations except on a limited scale. Therefore, programs designed to improve race relations should be continued in desegregated schools. These include: black history, race relations workshops and seminars for student leaders.

. Misunderstandings and inadequate knowledge persist in public discussions of desegregation. The goals of the program are not clear; the general public identifies busing and desegregation as identical and the emphasis upon academic achievement clouds discussions about constitutional equity. There is still a need to help the general public understanding what is at state in desegregation and to build a broad rhetorical foundation for this policy.

. Research on the effects of social class upon educational achievement should be continued.

Citizen Participation

. Since citizen participation has become increasingly rationalized at the local level, NIE might consider support and promoting interorganizational networks rather than sponsoring individual network associations.

. Grass roots decisions are "fragile" decisions in light of economic decisions. A turbulent field also makes it difficult for indigenous

for local groups to develop the kinds of political strength required in building alternative structures without external resources. An important resource at NIE's disposal is providing assistance to persons and groups to change professional recipes about schools.

Recipes and Rhetoric

Analysis of the rhetorical assumptions underlying local recipes about schools should be encouraged. If nothing else, this should being some clarity to discussions about education, and it might be a means to bring about some change in these recipes.

Educational change cannot be separate from community change. Therefore, the community context of educational innovation is a critical issue in educational change. Moreover, schools must be sensitive to their responsibilities in community maintenance.